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Navigating Identity in a Traditionally Masculine Field: The Experiences of Gay Students in Criminology Program

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ABSTRACT

A hegemonic masculinity professional culture often defines the fields of criminology and criminal justice. This environment prioritizes physical dominance and emotional suppression, which frequently marginalizes individuals with non-hegemonic identities. This study explores the lived experiences of gay students in a Criminology program, investigating how they navigate identity and build psychological resilience within a traditionally masculine academic environment. The research adopted a qualitative phenomenological design. The study was conducted at a higher education institution in Misamis Oriental, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. The participants consisted of five (5) self-identified gay students, ranging from 1st year to 4th year and aged 19–23, selected through purposive criterion-based sampling. The study revealed three major themes: (1) Negotiating Identity within a Masculinized Hegemony, (2) Strategic Adaptation and Psychological Resilience, and (3) Transformative Empowerment and the Path to Inclusivity. The study concludes that gay criminology students exist in a state of constant negotiation, requiring significant psychological labor and identity tax to navigate a masculine environment. Their academic persistence is sustained by a strong vocational calling, future-oriented goal setting, and robust external support systems that help maintain emotional equilibrium. It is recommended that the Criminology Department formalize identity-neutral mentorship and merit-based selection matrices. At the same time, the Guidance and Counseling Office should provide strength-based workshops to help students translate their unique lived experiences into professional advantages for modern community policing.

Keywords: Masculinized Hegemony; Psychological Resilience; Identity Negotiation; Inclusivity; LGBTQ; Criminology; Resilience, Navigating Identity, Macho Culture, Psychological Labor, Identity Tax, Chilly Environment.

1.0. Introduction

The discipline of criminology and the broader criminal justice system have long been intertwined with institutions such as law enforcement, corrections, and militarized agencies. This historical alignment has cultivated a professional culture that prioritizes characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, namely, physical dominance, emotional suppression, assertiveness, and authoritative control. As emphasized by Bartlett and Ricciardelli (2023), these traits are embedded not only in the operational norms of these institutions but also in theoretical frameworks and policy decisions within the field. Physical fitness tests, tactical drills, and fieldwork often emphasize stamina, strength, and aggression. This has led to what scholars describe as a default masculinity, wherein the values, behaviors, and expectations within criminology privilege men and masculine expressions, casting women, queer individuals, and non-hegemonic masculinities as outsiders or anomalies (Messerschmidt, 2019).

This masculine framing is also evident in the physical and performance demands embedded in criminology education, particularly in programs designed to prepare students for law enforcement careers. Physical fitness tests, tactical drills, and fieldwork often emphasize stamina, strength, and aggression.

In contexts where policing is perceived as inherently masculine, students who do not conform to these physical or behavioral ideals may feel compelled to perform masculinity to gain acceptance. For gay students in criminology,

this masculine culture can create role tension and visibility concerns. They may feel pressured to conceal or modify their gender expressions to gain social acceptance, avoid stigma, or blend in with peers and instructors. Over the past few years, public perceptions of gay people have evolved considerably, with growing social acceptance and expanded legal rights in numerous regions across the globe. (Angelo, 2021). However, challenges and disparities persist, particularly in areas of mental health, discrimination, and social acceptance.

The significance of this study may benefit academic institutions, particularly criminology educators and administrators, by offering insights that can guide the development of more inclusive policies, teaching approaches, and support systems. For students, the study may promote awareness, empathy, and respect for diversity within the learning environment

1.1. Study Objectives

1) To explore and understand the lived experiences of gay students within the traditionally masculine and paramilitary-oriented environment of criminology programs.
2) To examine how the specific cultural and academic context of the criminology field influences the identity formation and self-expression of gay students.
3) To identify and evaluate the specific coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies employed by gay students to navigate the demands of a traditionally rigid academic setting.
4) To capture and describe the "essence" of what it means to be a gay student in a high-discipline program, highlighting the common themes that emerge from their individual narratives.
5) To provide data-driven insights that can inform the development of more inclusive academic policies and support systems for diverse student populations in the field.

2.0. Literature Review

In many parts of the world, LGBTQI+ people still face discrimination, stigma, and violence. Masculine framing contributes to the institutional invisibility of SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics) concerns, often leading to severe health, social, and economic disparities (Joudane, 2024). Moreover, Queer perspectives are frequently omitted or minimized in criminology curricula, classroom discussions rarely address LGBTIQ+ experiences in crime and justice. This has led to what scholars describe as a "default masculinity," wherein the values, behaviors, and expectations within criminology privilege men and masculine expressions, casting women, queer individuals, and non-hegemonic masculinities as outsiders or anomalies (Messerschmidt, 2019).

In the Philippine context, social acceptance of LGBTQ people is relatively high by global comparison; about 11% of Filipinos identify as LGBT+, yet legal protection at the national level remains absent because the SOGIE Equality Bill has not been passed. The policy gap contributes to uneven campus protections and inconsistent grievance mechanisms (Fleck, 2024). Meanwhile, the 2024 Philippine National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People ages 15-24 reported heavy burdens of 62% with recent depression symptoms, 62% with

anxiety, and 75% having seriously considered suicide, a context that heightens the need for supportive campus climate and faculty practices (Guardian, 2024). Studies of schools and universities in the country document widespread discrimination that negatively affects LGBTQ students' safety, mental health, and educational outcomes (Thoreson, 2023).

Also, a study conducted at Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU) in Mati, Philippines, found that female and non-masculine students sometimes adopt masculine-coded behaviors, such as doing push-ups or projecting a tougher demeanor, to fit in or cope with the program's expectations (Villegas et al., 2022). Furthermore, the intellectual foundations and research priorities of criminology have often neglected gender and sexuality as central axes of inquiry. The discipline has been critiqued for being "gender-blind," relying on male-centered frameworks to explain crime, deviance, and social order, while overlooking how gender influences offending, victimization, policing, and justice outcomes (Messerschmidt, 2019).

3.0. Materials and Methods

In this study, a phenomenological research design is used to capture the lived experiences of gay students in the criminology program, which employs observation, notes, and interviews to examine non-numerical data in depth. It entails interviewing participants and analyzing their perspectives to understand the universal experience. The phenomenological approach provides a lens to explore the subjective realities of gay students within the criminology discipline, prioritizing their personal perceptions and interpretation of their academic and social journeys. To capture the depth and nuance of these experiences, ranging from classroom dynamics to perception of future law enforcement roles, this qualitative research utilized in-depth interviews. This method allows for the collection of rich, detailed narratives that reveal how these students negotiate their identity within the specific cultural and institutional framework of criminology.

The research was conducted at a higher education institution in Misamis Oriental, Philippines with 1,720 population in the College of Criminal Justice and Public Safety. Its criminology program reflects broader national trends that position the field as predominantly male-dominated and shaped by masculine norms, with a strong emphasis on preparing students for careers in law enforcement, security, and corrections. The Institution, with a vision to become a premier community-based institution by 2030, is committed to producing competent graduates who are well-equipped with knowledge and skills, driven by values, and aligned with global standards.

The participants of this study were five self-identified gay students currently enrolled in the criminology program. It employed purposive sampling, specifically criterion-based selection, to identify participants who could meaningfully share their lived experiences relevant to the research questions. Inclusion criteria included: (1) active enrollment in the program, (2) self-identification as gay, and (3) willingness to participate in an in-depth interview.

The involved using an interview guide question to collect participant data. This interview guide was submitted for validation to the adviser, panel, and ethics board of the university and was approved for use by the committee. Questions that the participants could understand were utilized and translated into the vernacular for clearer understanding. The approach contained an introduction, an explanation, an opening question, the main question,

and a concluding question. During the in-depth interviews, the researcher used open-ended questions and narrative responses to elicit participants' responses. Additionally, the researcher utilized an electronic recording device to capture all relevant data throughout the interviews.

Before the researchers conducted the interview with the identified participants, the researcher first obtained approval from the Dean of the Graduate School to conduct the study. Following this, the researcher submitted the pertinent documents to the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee (MUREC) for ethical review and subsequently obtained permission from the Dean of the College of Criminology at the institution where the study was conducted. After receiving all necessary approvals, the researcher identified potential participants by coordinating with teachers and students at the College of Criminal Justice and Public Safety to obtain current students' data, and participants' identities were selected from the list. The participants' consent and voluntariness were ensured, and the researcher maintained the confidentiality of their identities throughout the study. Upon confirmation of informed consent, the researcher scheduled the interviews and provided participants with a copy of the interview questions to help them recall their experiences. The interviews were conducted at times and locations that allowed participants to freely express their stories. Clarifications related to the interviews were addressed during the sessions, and all responses were transcribed for thematic analysis.

The research began by seeking approval from the appropriate authority, ensuring that the study adheres to established ethical guidelines and standards. This study raised ethical considerations that revolved around the principles of respect, confidentiality, and participant well-being. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, researchers ensured that the dignity and privacy of the women participating in the study are safeguarded throughout the inquiry process. The researcher followed the guidelines outlined in the Republic Act No. 10173 Mediterranean Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences (MJBAS) ―Data Privacy Act of 2012‖. Informed consent becomes paramount, with participants fully understanding the purpose, potential risks, and benefits of their involvement. Additionally, the researchers adopted measures to protect the anonymity of the women, especially considering the potential impact on their professional and personal lives. Frequent oversight and ethical evaluations are essential to uphold the integrity and responsibility of the research process, ensuring that it aligns with ethical standards and the well-being of the participants.

This study employed the transcendental phenomenology technique developed by Moustakas (1994) for data analysis. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to Moustakas' method, following these steps: (1) Bracketing, (2) Horizonalization, (3) Clustering into Themes, (4) Textural Description, (5) Structural Description, and (6) Textural-Structural Synthesis.

Bracketing was a technique used to reduce the influence of preconceived notions and biases before a study begins. It involved setting aside judgments and biases. This led to an in-depth investigation from the choice of topic and population, through the design of interviews, to the collection and interpretation of data, and finally to the dissemination of research findings.

Horizonalization refers to listing all verbatim expressions relevant to the study. Initially, researchers treated all statements with equal importance. Then, any statements that are irrelevant, repetitive, overlapping, or beyond the

study's scope are disregarded. The remaining statements, known as horizons, are considered meaningful parts of the phenomenon. Moustakas noted that "Horizons are infinite" and described horizontalization as an ongoing process (Moustakas, 1994).

Clustering was the next step in drawing inferences from the study. It involved condensing experiences into invariant horizons, developing core themes, and validating these horizons using various data sources. Researchers grouped statements into themes, ensuring each theme had a singular meaning when reduced to horizons. To validate the invariant horizons, researchers reviewed findings from other studies using different methods like observation, field notes, focus groups, and related literature. This validation was crucial for ensuring the accuracy and clarity of the representations.

Textural description details how participants perceive the phenomenon. To create this description, researchers used verbatim excerpts from interviews and narrated the meaning units derived from themes. Structural description, or the explanation of how the phenomenon occurred, incorporated imaginative variation—a creative perspective—to enhance the textual description. In the textural-structural synthesis process, researchers combined each participant's meaning units into a composite textural and structural description shared by all participants. This narrative, written in the third person, aimed to encapsulate the essence of the phenomenon's experience, achieving the primary goal of Moustakas' method.

4.0. Results and Discussion

This part presented the different themes that were derived from the different responses of the participants of the study during the conduct of the interview. The study explored the lived experiences of gay students in criminology program in one of the higher institutions in Misamis Oriental using qualitative approach through Moustaka’s transcendental phenomenology and participated by 5 selected gay students. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. The selection was based on the following criteria: active enrollment in the program, self-identification as gay, and willingness to participate in an in-depth interview.

4.1. Profile of the Participant

The participants that the researcher selected is derived from the lived experiences of five (5) gay students currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Criminology program in Misamis Oriental. These participants, ranging in age from 19 to 23 and in 1st to 4th year, offer a developmental perspective on how sexual orientation interacts with the rigorous demands of a traditionally masculine academic field.

4.2. Negotiating Identity within a Masculinized Hegemony

This theme explores the multifaceted experiences faced by gay students in navigating their identity within a hegemonic-masculine cultured program. This theme reveals a pervasive environmental reality defined by structural toughness, a landscape where traditional archetypes of grit and resilience create a persistent friction for participants. This atmosphere acts as an invisible yet rigid barrier, requiring constant performance in both academic and physical training. Academic and professional standing frequently hinge upon a trainee's proficiency

in executing specific gendered scripts, behavioral blueprints rooted in heteronormative ideals (Tabert, 2021). The students experience macho cultural pressures and subtle bias, Participants experience the weight of a social climate that prizes traditional masculinity, often leading to identity-based labeling or microaggressions. The responses from participants P1, and P2 offer valuable insights into the diverse challenges and experiences encountered by gay criminology students:

"There are few of my classmates who call me gay and laugh, I don't feel hurt since I accept my identity. I just don't like them calling me gay in front of people who aren't my friends". (P1)

"My experience as a Criminology student has been both challenging and rewarding. Many people assume Criminology is only for men, and even some classmates have said this to me. The program has taught me discipline, resilience, and perseverance. Physical drills, fitness tests, and training exercises push me every day, helping me grow in confidence and teamwork. Being bisexual in this environment has also been a journey of self-acceptance. With my classmates, I show them who I really am, especially with my close friends." (P2)

These dynamics also foster a condition of Emotional Vigilance, leaving participants in a constant state of high alert as they navigate their surroundings to mitigate the risks of subtle exclusionary biases (Colvin, 2022). Consequently, this environment imposes an identity tax, a form of persistent psychological labor in which students must expend significant mental energy on self-monitoring and the concealment of personal traits to avoid triggering institutional prejudices (Pritchard & McCuaig, 2024).

This are evident in the participant's statement:

"I am somewhat cautious about sharing my identity in school settings. Since I feel that I need to appear strong and "snappy" as a Criminology student, I do not always show my true self. However, I am more comfortable opening up to classmates I trust, especially those who accept me for who I am." (P4)

"With close friends, yes. In class discussions, not always. I still scan the room before I speak, like checking if it's safe. Do I feel unsafe? Not physically. But emotionally, sometimes yes." (P5)

However, there is the internal and external conflict experienced by gay criminology students who feel a profound, intrinsic drive to serve, often viewed as a vocation or calling, while simultaneously facing systemic and cultural obstacles that threaten their belonging. The calling is rooted in a desire for purpose-driven perseverance, a commitment to justice, and a drive to challenge the status quo from within the law enforcement profession.

These are the shared statements of the participants:

"I chose the criminology course because I am interested in justice, discipline, and public safety. I like the course because it is challenging and it helps me grow as a person. Through this program, I can learn about the laws, protect people, and prepare myself to work in the police force or other security agencies in the future." (P1)

"*Pursuing Criminology is a commendable decision, especially since I want to make my parents proud and be the first in my family to join the uniformed service. My motivation comes from a desire to serve and contribute positively to society. My dedication and perseverance will undoubtedly inspire others." (P2)*

"*Since high school, I have already chosen Criminology because it is my dream to become a policeman someday." (P4)*

This framework explains that individuals do not just choose a career based on their personality traits instead, they construct their career by giving personal meaning to their past experiences and future goals. The internal conflict between an intrinsic vocational drive and institutional resistance is a central tension for gay criminology students who view their career path as a form of social reclamation (Vargas & Miller, 2024). This purpose-driven perseverance allows individuals to reinterpret systemic macho barriers not as absolute dead ends but as obstacles to be navigated through a personal commitment to justice and reform (Peralta & Cruz, 2021).

Moreover, research supports that despite the participants' awareness of the macho and often hostile culture of these programs, they were primarily driven by a vocational calling (Peralta, & Cruz, 2021), participants choose these careers specifically because they feel a profound duty to change the system from within, which aligns with the participants' desire to challenge stereotypes while serving the public (Fuller et al.,2022).

Furthermore, Rineer et al. (2023) highlight that individuals with a strong calling rooted in service and social contribution exhibit higher grit and lower susceptibility to burnout. This suggests that the participant's desire to inspire others and serve society acts as a protective factor, transforming high-pressure environments into venues for identity affirmation rather than alienation (Vaughn et al., 2022).

The experiences of the participants imply that the academic environment of criminology serves as a critical site for the negotiation of hegemonic masculinity, where gay and bisexual students must navigate a hidden curriculum of heteronormative expectations to achieve professional belonging. While these students successfully demonstrate high levels of discipline and physical competence, effectively subverting stereotypes of weakness, they do so at the cost of significant emotional labor and constant vigilance.

Furthermore, it implies that while these students show incredible resilience, the burden of inclusion currently rests on their shoulders rather than the institution's. Despite the rigors of a macho culture program, the theme also indicates that pursuing a Criminology degree serves as a deeply internalized vocational calling for gay and bisexual students, which effectively transcends traditional gender-based barriers. Their motivation is rooted in a long-standing commitment to justice, discipline, and public safety, often manifesting as a professional dream established as early as high school.

4.3. Strategic Adaptation and Psychological Resilience

This theme represents the transition from recognizing the environment to understanding the active power students exert within it. This theme focuses on the specific actions, mental shifts, and emotional controls participants use to bridge the gap between their true identities and the rigid requirements of the criminology program. Through impression management and selective disclosure that functions as an interconnected survival strategies that allow students to navigate the friction between their authentic selves and the rigid expectations of the criminology program. To cognitive re-framing, the internal psychological tools students use to neutralize the stressors of a

high-pressure, traditionally masculine academic environment. And their purpose driven perseverance, the primary motivational engine, enabling students to transform systemic challenges into personal missions for social change.

Rather than being passive victims of a macho culture, students act as social navigators, carefully managing how much of themselves they reveal and to whom (Brooks & Chambers, 2023). By transforming these institutional hurdles into personal victories, students systematically validate their skills in a space that historically prioritized traditional archetypes of toughness (Garrett, 2024).

These are evident in the responses of the participants during interview on how they strategically adapt to the hegemonic masculine environment and how they showed resilience:

"With my close friends, I'm open and comfortable. But with others, especially those who are very masculine or conservative. I tend to be more careful and not as outspoken." (P1)

"I focus on my abilities because I know I can succeed regardless of their opinions. The program has taught me discipline, resilience, and perseverance." (P2)

"I remind myself that being different is not a weakness. I focus on my strength's communication empathy discipline and academic skill and use them to show that I belong in the program just as much as anyone else." (P4)

"I told them and can prove to them that I can finish this program even if I'm gay and also prove to them that my gender is not hindrance to conquer my dream." (P2)

"Being gay is not a barrier to entering the program. What truly matters is compassion, determination, and the drive to achieve your goals." (P4)

Recent qualitative research confirms that students use identity negotiation to manage their presence in these masculine spaces, often relying on informal support systems when institutional ones feel unsafe (Lupos, 2025). This identity work involves a period in which students impersonate an idealized professional, such as a stoic, snappy, and authoritative officer, before these traits are truly internalized (Merton & Ross, 2024).

Additionally, a study by Bakar et al. (2022) exploring students' persistence in high-stress, vocational disciplines found that a sense of calling is the strongest predictor of academic grit. This purpose-driven mindset allows them to re-frame their daily struggles as opportunities to defy stereotypes and prove their worth. Rather than being discouraged by the pressure to fit a specific tough-guy mold, they focus on their actual skills and discipline to earn respect. Even when participants feel like outsiders or face a chilly environment, they draw strength from their long-term mission to become law enforcement officers (Sifelani, 2026). This theme implies for these students, resilience is a form of Identity Work. They are not just waiting to become officers; they are impersonating the ideal officer as a way to navigate a chilly environment. Over time, these tactical performances become internalized traits, allowing them to bridge the gap between their true selves and the rigid archetypes of the Criminology field.

4.4. Transformative Empowerment and The Path to Inclusivity

This theme serves as the definitive turning point in the participants' journey. It marks the transition from merely surviving a "macho" culture to actively reshaping it. This theme suggests that empowerment is not a static

achievement but a continuous process of proving competence, finding community, and advocating for systemic change. By mastering the very requirements that once felt exclusionary, students move from the periphery of the program to its center, eventually envisioning an academe where diversity is viewed as a professional asset rather than a liability. This stage represents a reclaiming of the professional narrative, in which students move beyond the psychological burden of minority stress to embrace their identity as a unique asset for systemic reform (Vargas & Miller, 2024). By excelling in a culture that historically marginalized them, these individuals demonstrate that true resilience is not just the ability to endure, but the capacity to transform one's outsider status into a source of meritocratic authority (Graham & Bennett, 2024).

The participants' experiences reveal that Reclaiming Agency Through Physical and Academic Mastery serves as a powerful mechanism for overcoming the anomaly status often assigned to marginalized students. By excelling in high-stakes physical drills and fitness tests, participants shift the focus from their gender identity to their tangible competence, effectively utilizing the program's rigorous standards as a platform for professional validation. For participant 1, physical training acts as a universal equalizer. Similarly, Participant 2 explicitly rejects the idea that their identity as a gay student is a big deal or a hindrance. Ultimately, by excelling in these demanding spaces, students demonstrate that their dedication to the craft is the defining feature of their identity, successfully shifting their status from outsiders to capable and respected peers. These are the shared statements from participants.

"They challenge me to push my limits, build discipline, and develop resilience, just like they do for everyone else. I don't feel my identity limits me during these activities, I focus on performing well and keeping up with my peers. In fact, participating in physical training helps me gain confidence, earn respect from classmates, and connect with others through shared effort and teamwork." (P1)

"Physical activities is not a big deal because I'm not just a gay criminology student. I'm also very active in sport and physical activities, so I believe that this thing is not a big deal for me, I can do and perform those activities as a criminology student." (P2)

Participants also identify specific relational spaces, ranging from close-knit peer groups to supportive faculty-student interactions that serve as essential anchors for their resilience. relies on close friends and family as primary sources of support and emotional anchors; they serve as a main support system.

These are the participants statements:

"*My closest friends are my main support system" (P1)*

"My family and friends always support the things that I want and also, they are always there if I need them the most. And they always give me advice that I always apply to myself." (P2)

"Journaling, exercising, and talking to close friends help me manage stress." (P3)

Participant 1 and 2 exemplifies the utilitarian value of marginalized identities within the field. By framing their bisexuality as a source of empathy and open-mindedness, the participant moves beyond mere resilience and toward professional self-efficacy. The student believes that being bisexual or having a diverse gender identity enhances

their ability to serve by providing them with greater empathy and open-mindedness, traits that are increasingly valued in modern, community-oriented law enforcement.

These are stressed in their answers:

"I think it will make me more empathetic, understanding, and open-minded. I believe being bisexual will not limit my ability to serve." (P1)

"I believe that my gender identity is not a hindrance to serve my community in the future." (P2)

Participants explicitly identify a desire for workshops on diversity and inclusion and discusses the tension between traditional masculinity and staying authentic. This highlights that an inclusive culture is one where a student's performance is the primary focus, and the singular, professional identity of a Criminology student replaces labels like the gay student. These are statements shared by participants:

"I wish the school offered more workshops on diversity and inclusion to make spaces safer." (P3)

"I have learned is the importance of finding strength in my own identity. There are times when I feel out of place, especially in environments where toughness and traditional masculinity are expected. However, through these experiences, I have discovered how important it is to stay authentic and true to myself." (P4)

Additionally, Participant 5 provides a powerful concluding thought, the desire to be seen as capable. This highlights that an inclusive culture is one where a student's performance is the primary focus, and the singular, professional identity of a Criminology student replaces labels like the gay student.

"I just want to be seen as capable, not 'the gay criminology student." (P5)

Participants' aspirations for a learning environment where professional merit is the sole arbiter of success. Rather than seeking a relaxation of the program's rigorous standards, gay students express a deep-seated commitment to an institutional culture that mirrors the evolving professional standards of the global justice system. By advocating for a culture of inclusivity, participants position themselves as proactive contributors to the program's prestige, suggesting that an environment free of social friction allows all students to achieve their highest academic and physical potential.

A study on Inclusive Masculinity and Peer Support in High-Reliability Organizations argues that strong social bonds within disciplined cohorts significantly improve the retention and performance of minority students (Anderson & Magrath, 2021). The participants' desire for a merit-based, inclusive culture is strongly supported by contemporary research on the professionalization of justice services. According to Loftus (2021), the modern standard for policing excellence has shifted to include inclusive intelligence, in which empathy and diverse life experiences are viewed as critical tactical assets rather than hindrances.

The collective desire for an inclusive academic culture implies that the professional success of gay students in Criminology is rooted in their ability to transform the program's physical and academic rigors into a platform for self-validation and meritocratic respect. Supported by a multidimensional network of family and peer

microsystems, these students can cognitively reframe institutional stressors as developmental milestones, proving that relational security is a fundamental driver of academic performance and professional persistence. This evolution implies that inclusivity is a functional competency, one that enhances inclusive intelligence and empathy, rather than a mere social preference, allowing students to redirect their energy from the psychological labor of fitting in toward mastering the discipline. Ultimately, by shifting toward a culture that prioritizes professional capability over identity-based archetypes, the institution fosters a more resilient, mission-focused cohort equipped to navigate the ethical and tactical complexities of modern law enforcement.

5.0. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were crafted by the researcher: The participants varied in year level from 1st year to 4th year self-identified gay criminology students. This variation provides a comprehensive view of the different challenges and triumphs among gay criminology students, highlighting their diverse experiences in criminology program.

The study concludes that participants exist in a state of constant negotiation, where their academic success requires significant "psychological labor." To survive in a masculine environment, students must maintain high levels of emotional vigilance and use strategic self-presentation, suggesting that while they are professionally capable, the current institutional climate imposes a unique "identity tax" on their educational experience.

The study revealed that perseverance of these students is sustained by a combination of future-oriented goal setting and robust external support. By utilizing cognitive reframing, students transform environmental hostility into professional preparation, while relying on "safe relational spaces" provided by family and peers to maintain the emotional equilibrium necessary to endure the rigors of the program.

The study concludes that there is a need to transition toward a strictly merit-based culture where professional competence and integrity are the sole benchmarks for success. Shifting the focus from gender performance to functional mastery not only validates the capabilities of LGBTQ+ students but also better prepares all graduates for the realities of modern, diverse policing.

6.0. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are crafted by the researchers:

1. To the Criminology Department and faculty can enhance institutional equity by formalizing identity-neutral mentorship and standardized merit-based selection. By establishing confidential peer-mentorship circles led by inclusive senior students, the department creates a safe space for marginalized individuals to address hidden curriculum challenges without fear of academic consequence. Simultaneously, the implementation of a public Leadership Competency Matrix, which evaluates students based on objective data like fitness scores, GPA, and teamwork, ensures that leadership roles are anchored in visible professional merit rather than traditional social archetypes or biases.
2. To the Student Organizations and Peer Leadership, may promote a culture of capability, organize departmental activities that emphasize collaborative skill-building and professional discipline, helping to shift the peer

culture away from social conformity and toward mutual respect for individual talent. Integrate seminars that connect personal resilience to professional readiness. By framing emotional equilibrium as a tactical skill necessary for modern law enforcement, the school can help students maintain their purpose-driven perseverance within the formal curriculum.

3. To the Guidance and Counseling Office can support professional identity development by facilitating strength-based identity workshops and specialized career-pathing modules. Utilizing the 4-D Appreciative Inquiry model, counselors can help students discover how their unique lived experiences translate into "design advantages," such as the enhanced cultural competency vital for modern community policing. Furthermore, by providing dedicated training in professional integration, the office assists students in maintaining personal authenticity while successfully adhering to the disciplined roles required by the criminology profession, effectively turning their diverse perspectives into professional strengths.

4. To the Future Researchers, may explore and assess competency outcomes, conduct further studies to measure how inclusive academic environments specifically impact the functional competency of graduates once they enter active service in diverse communities. And evaluating institutional values, perform a comparative analysis of different criminology programs to determine which specific policies most effectively reinforce the values of integrity and meritocracy across diverse student populations.

Declarations

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Competing Interests Statement

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

Consent for publication

The author declares that she consented to the publication of this study.

Consent for participate

The participants in this study voluntarily gave their informed consent before their involvement in the research.

Author's Contribution

The author took part in literature review, analysis, and manuscript writing.

Availability of data and material

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